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Maine Fire Marshal News, March 2011

Maine Office of State Fire Marshal

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Maine Fire Marshal News

Maine State Fire Marshal's Office • Fire Research
Maine Department of Public Safety
Fire Marshal's Web Page

March 2011

Spring 2011 Vol. 2, Issue No. 9

WELCOME!

Welcome to the 20th issue of the *Maine Fire Marshal News*. This newsletter was first released six years ago this month. You can view the very first issue by going to our web page. Please take some time to read the newsletter and send us your own article for a future publication or comments in general. As always, we do appreciate the feedback on the newsletter many of you have sent over the past few years and look forward to hearing from you more in the future.



A MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE MARSHAL

Bill Nimitz said it best: “‘Amazing’ gift for love of Maine.” The columnist was referencing the \$180,000 mobile command center given to the State Fire Marshal's Office from

Gil and Anne Blais. It is true you don't see this sort of generosity often. Gil Blais, a successful business man who worked hard to conceptualize and manufacture rolling veterinary clinics, switched his focus to command vehicles following the events of 9/11. In addition to command and veterinary vehicles the LaBoit company

manufactures mobile dental vehicles and has distributed its product line to all 50 states as well as other countries including Canada, Puerto Rico, Dubai, Africa and Jamaica.

The vehicle he donated to our office (pictured below) is 33 feet long and almost 12 feet tall. It was a much needed item for the Fire Marshal's team of investigators and inspectors and will allow them to not simply stay warm during the cold months but give the comfort needed to carefully examine items discovered at a fire scene. The command vehicle has an awning for staff members to work under.



With government budgets being stretched beyond the breaking point and many agencies facing cut backs, the purchase of such a vehicle was simply not on the top of my list at this time. Though I was aware ahead of time that the gift was coming, I was still thrilled to receive the keys at a ceremony held in the Lewiston Central Fire Station.

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The ceremony was attended by Governor Paul LePage, Representative Mike Michaud, Lewiston Mayor Laurent Gilbert, the Fire Marshal and of course, Gil and Anne Blais along with many others from the Fire Marshal's Office and fire service in general.



Fire Marshal's Command Vehicle on a fire scene in Readfield, Maine

Since receiving the gift in February the command vehicle has been on the scene of too many incidents including the unfortunate arson homicide incident in Readfield. This is a gift that, ironically, you wish you didn't have to use that much. Five of the incidents to which the vehicle has been deployed have been fires where people were killed.

In closing, let me just thank the Blais family again for their considerable generosity to the State of Maine and the Fire Marshal's Office. Though they are from Lewiston, there were 49 other states that would have been just as happy to receive this gift.

Now, I'd like to wish you and yours, on behalf of the entire Fire Marshal's staff, a happy and safe spring season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John C. Dean".

John C. Dean
Fire Marshal



THE DIFFERENCE BUILDING CODES CAN AND DO HAVE

By Richard E. Taylor, Senior Research and Planning Analyst

I realize that building fire and life safety engineered features into a given structure is not free. There is a cost to these safety features. But when I turned on the TV recently and watched buildings over thirty stories tall sway back and forth like willow trees in summer I realized just how valuable these codes are.

I'm talking of course about the terrible earthquake in Japan. As bad as the earthquake and subsequent tsunamis were, it could have been much worse. Because Japan planned and invested so much with safety in mind, countless lives were saved along with extraordinary amounts in property losses. The people of Japan are well aware of the country's geological position and have had a history of earthquakes and tremors going back centuries. So they were prepared when this 8.9 earthquake hit and their focus on prevention paid off.

The events in Japan brought to mind the events of 100 years ago this week in New York City. At the Triangle Shirtwaist factory 146 people were killed in a fire at a factory in downtown New York. Some perished because of burns, the inhalation of smoke and fumes, or from jumping out of windows nine stories up. The fire spawned such public outrage that it redefined labor laws, politics and yes, building codes. What amazes me today is that there is still such fierce opposition to building codes and in particular long standing principles such as adequate means of egress, fire alarm and suppression systems.

Just two weeks ago there was a fire in a day care in Houston, Texas that took the lives of 4 children. At approximately the same time nearly 50 children successfully escaped a blaze in a Phoenix, AZ child care center. The key difference was sprinklers. It's understandable that most people don't think about such disasters because well...who wants to? There is also the

inclination to ignore it because what are the odds? It reminds me of one of those Dirty Harry movies where Harry, played by Clint Eastwood, asks the bad guy if he “feels lucky?”

I want to conclude by saying it doesn't have to be one way or the other or about luck. You can have codes, safety and economic opportunity all together. It just requires sound planning. A good example is what's going on at the new Washburn-Norlands Living History Center located at 290 Norlands Road, Livermore, Maine. The 19th century barn and attached farmers cottage burned to the ground in an accidental fire. Rebuilding the structure required balancing fire safety with the value of authenticity. Executive Director Kathleen Beauregard put it this way:

“Recreating the circa-1870 Farmers’ Cottage was no easy task. Careful attention to the finish details had to hide modern elements and create functional 19th century aspects, such as a working hand pump at the slate kitchen sink. The cottage also had to be built to meet today’s life safety codes, including a fire-suppression sprinkler system. The builders, managed by the talented crew from Wright-Ryan Homes of Portland rose to the task of combining all of these goals.

Over 50% of the subcontractors were from the Western Maine regional community. Many donated extra time or materials to help the museum meet the budget. Floor boards were harvested from the Norlands’ forest, milled nearby and nailed by hand. Businesses such as Hancock Lumber, Hammond Lumber, Central Appliance and Sherwin-Williams Paint donated materials and equipment. Volunteers gathered to accomplish finishing touches, such as interior painting, cabinetry and the assembly of donated artifacts, such as rope beds and an antique wood cookstove.”

The beautiful new structure is both fire safe and maintains its unique 19th century look. *It is a classic example of how you can, with careful planning, have it both ways.* What's even better, is the fact that this structure will not be lost again to fire. The investment is protected by the fire sprinkler system as are those who visit and experience life on an 19th century Maine farm.

For those of you who would like to see this beautiful farm here is the address and contact information:

Kathleen Beauregard, Executive Director
Washburn-Norlands Living History Center
290 Norlands Road
Livermore, ME 04253
207-897-4366 or 207-513-7475
<http://www.norlands.org/>



Would you let your child play with fire?

Every year thousands of Americans, mostly children, are hurt by consumer fireworks such as sparklers and firecrackers. Many are burned, scarred or disfigured by fireworks that are legal, but still very dangerous and cause fires. This year, an alliance of health and safety advocates asks you to keep fireworks from hurting your family. The risk is too great.

Leave fireworks to the professionals.

National Fire Protection Association along with American Academy of Family Physicians • American Academy of Ophthalmology • American Academy of Pediatrics • American Association for Hand Surgery • American Association of Public Health Physicians • American Burn Association • American College of Emergency Physicians • American Society of Plastic Surgeons • Emergency Nurses Association • Fire Department Safety Officers Association • International Association of Arson Investigators • International Association of Fire Chiefs • International Association of Fire Fighters • International Fire Marshals Association • Metropolitan Fire Chiefs • National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners • National Association of School Nurses • National Association of State Fire Marshals • National Volunteer Fire Council • Prevent Blindness America

MAINE'S MOST CATASTROPHIC FIRE: THE INSANE HOSPITAL FIRE OF 1850

By Richard E. Taylor, Senior Research and Planning Analyst

For years we had thought the Lacoste Foster Home fire, which took the lives of 17, was the most catastrophic fire in our history. Thanks to a tip from Augusta Fire Chief Roger Audette, our intern Joel Nelson conducted some research on the fire that took place in 1850 here in Augusta. Here is his report.

The Augusta Insane Hospital opened to patients in 1840, caring for those who we now characterize as having a mental illness. (Douin) The hospital got its financial start from the Maine Legislature, in 1834, when the legislature appropriated \$20,000 with the understanding the hospital would raise the rest of their funding through outside donations. (Douin)

The hospital was built on Augusta's East side, where today it still stands on Hospital Street. The hospital had three main parts in 1840; the Centre building, a south wing, and north wing. The Centre building was a large four story structure, made of granite, and measuring over 250 feet long.

Connected to the Centre Building were the three story north and south wings that measured roughly 100 feet long. As time continued, two solitary co-ed buildings were erected, and a new additional wing was built for the men. (Johnston)

In 1848 after the evaluation of the current heating systems, that was in the existing hospital, the discussion was made to try a new type of steam heating system in the new men's wing recently constructed. The system plan they installed and followed came from six similar types of systems in Massachusetts at the McLean Asylum. Dr. James

Bates, Superintendent, constructed and installed this new, modern heating system in the new wing. In 1849, the same heating system was installed in the original 1840 south wing. The steam heating system installed was a type of wood fired steam furnace that resided in the basement. Wooden flues, hooked to the furnace, acted as duct work to deliver hot air to each room in each wing. The steam heating system proved to be a successful way to heat the hospital. (Johnston)

Early in the morning of December 4, 1850, at 3 a.m. a fire was discovered by the fireman, Mr. James P. Weeks, after he noticed smoke rolling out of the hot air ducts in the hallways of the old south wing. When he arrived in the basement, he found the wooden air chamber that fed the heating flues, and the floor joists were on fire. After throwing a couple on buckets of water on the fire, Weeks determined the fire was too big to stop. (Johnston) Word spread quickly around the hospital campus of the fire and soon to the residents of Augusta and Hallowell. Male patients were evacuated out of the intensifying smoke conditions in the old south wing until the smoke was too thick. Rescues were attempted from ladders, outside of the south wing, as the fire raged on and the fire engines arrived on the campus. The fire was brought under control later in the day and the north wing and part of the centre building were all that were left intact. The two south wings were gutted and the exterior granite walls were basically the only thing left standing. It was determined in the following days that 27 male patients and one male attendant died as

a result of smoke inhalation and their bodies perished in the fire. (Journal)

Later investigation and testimony through the court system determined that the steam heating furnace was improperly installed in the old wing and it was the cause of the deadly fire. It was thought that Dr. Bates made the mistake of running the smoke pipe directly through the wooden air chamber box where the smoke pipe connected to the chimney at a 90 degree angle. All that surrounded the smoke pipe and connection to the chimney was wood, used as a cost savings. Whereas in the new south wing, built first, brick was used between the furnace and wood flues, as well as surrounding the connection from the smoke pipe to the chimney. The last time the furnace was filled with wood was 9 o'clock, 6 hours before the fire was discovered. The Kennebec Journal theorizes that soot could have built up in the smoke pipe and chimney, spread to the wood components, and started the fire. (Journal)

Works Cited

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Johnston, George Whitaker. The History of The Maine Insane Hospital. Orono, ME, 1956.
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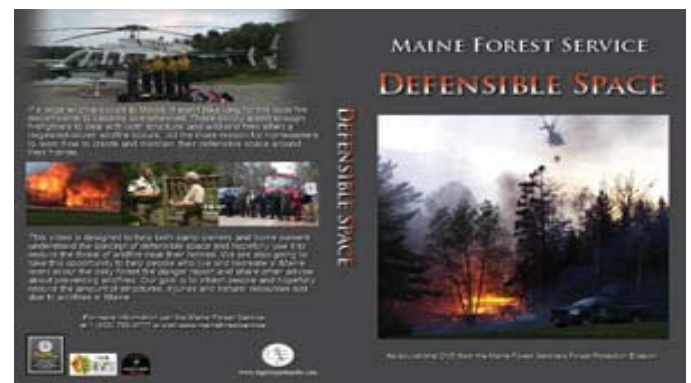
I would also like to credit Roger Audette, Augusta Fire Chief and Richard McCarthy, State Fire Marshal's Office Plans Review Supervisor for forwarding some e-mails to Richard Taylor, State Fire Marshal's Office Senior Research and Planning Analyst. As a college intern with the State Fire

Marshal's Office, I was given the opportunity to further research this deadly fire in 1850 and report my findings.

Joel Nelson is an intern in our office who is currently enrolled at Thomas College as a business major.

THE MAINE FOREST SERVICE RELEASES NEW EDUCATIONAL DVD

By Kent Nelson, Fire Prevention Specialist, Maine Forest Service



Using a fire Prevention and Safety grant from FEMA, the Maine Forest Service (MFS) recently produced an educational DVD entitled, "Defensible Space, it could save your home from a wildfire." The goal of the 20 minute DVD is to help homeowners reduce the risk of a wildfire near their homes. In 2009, seventy-five percent of all the wildfires reported to the MFS either damaged, threatened or destroyed structures in Maine.

Videotaping of the DVD began during the spring of 2010 in Northern Maine. A camp owner was willing to share the unforgettable experience of losing two eighty year old cabins to a wildfire. He had started a small campfire near his camps without realizing the dry and windy conditions were ideal for the fire to spread. The Ranger who responded to the fire wished he had the opportunity to inform the camp owner about "defensible space" and campfire safety before the tragic event occurred.

Several Maine Forest Rangers appear in the video and explain the reasons homeowners should maintain a minimum of 30' of "defensible space" around their homes and camps. A licensed arborist / landscaper also informs viewers how fire resistant plants can be used in place of flammable vegetation (such as softwood trees) to reduce the spread of fires near homes. Other topics covered in the video include: the daily forest fire danger report, how to be safe with recreational campfires and

and tips on evacuating from a wildfire.

Homeowners should contact the Maine Forest Service at 287-4990 or maine.forestrangers@maine.gov if they would like a free copy of the DVD. It can also be viewed on line at <http://www.maine.gov/doc/mfs/fpd/pages/wui/wui.html> or by visiting www.maine-forestservice.gov and selecting the "wildland urban interface" tab.

WOULD YOU NEGLECT YOUR HEART?

By Michael LaPlante, Master Electrician

According to a recent study conducted by the Fire Protection Research Foundation, most hazardous electrical conditions are caused by the poor installation or maintenance of electrical equipment. It closely examined the electrical systems and devices from 30 older homes in 10 states across the United States. The majority of homes in the study ranged in age from 25 years to more than 90 years (which is probably conservative for a state like Maine). During the study it was noted that service panels (what I refer to as the "Hearts" of electrical systems) in most of the homes surveyed had one or more significant safety problems due to aging, improper installation, or misuse. Stephen B. Johnson PH.D from the University of Maine Cooperative Extension echoes the same findings in the article Electrical Fires: Prevention and Extinguishing and states "Many fires result from defects in, or misuse of, the power delivery system (the "Heart"). Wiring often fails due to faulty installation, overloading, physical damage, aging, and deterioration by chemical action, heat, moisture and weather."

I have made many emergency calls on after hours because a home owner has partial power or no power at all. When I arrive, my first step is generally to remove the electrical panel cover. I often find that the main breaker is melted, the screws are black, the insulation on the wiring is bubbled, or there is soot inside the panel where a fire had occurred. It is sad to think what could have happened especially when there are children in the house. What is even more upsetting is that these poor electrical panel conditions and increased fire risk could have been prevented. The electrical contracting industry as a whole has not adequately and regularly communicated with homeowners regarding the importance of proper electrical system maintenance. Unfortunately, we have not educated the public on the preventive maintenance which should occur on a yearly basis. In today's society we have the mentality of "if it's not broke, don't fix it."

Electrical matters are more than just a nuisance if something goes wrong. After all, we aren't talking about having no heat or a flooded basement. When a component malfunctions within the electrical system there is a much higher risk of fire and fatalities, which are not laughing matters. The electrical panel is "The Heart" of the electrical system as it tells the electricity where to go and how much to supply. In addition, if maintained properly, it warns you when something is wrong and may even shut down as a safety measure. It is the most important part of the electrical system and if it does not function as it should, you could be at a high risk for injury, fatality or significant property damage. Just as the human heart needs to be cared for on a regular basis to make sure things are working properly, the electrical panel needs the same attention.

So you might ask, "so what should be done?" Lucky for you I like to write and I am a big believer in "if you bring an issue to the table, you also bring a solution." So the following are my recommendations for yearly maintenance of "The Heart" of your electrical system.

Year #1

- Document the manufacturer, approximate age, and amp rating of the panel.
- Verify that all breakers are UL Listed for the panel.
- Verify that all of the breakers are sized correctly.
- Verify that the panel is protected by a main breaker.
- Verify that the main breaker is sized correctly.

Year #1 and every year thereafter

- Apply anti-oxidant on all aluminum wires.
- Look for any burning or corrosion on the breakers or busbar.
- Tighten down ALL connections.
- Check the load balance on each phase of the panel using a clamp meter.
- Clean and remove dust and debris from the panel.
- Look for any signs of water entering the panel.

Performing these several steps is the difference between having an increased potential of a fire and the peace of mind knowing that you have taken reasonable care to protect your family and your home and dramatically reduce the risk of an electrical fire. At the beginning of this article, I asked, "Would you neglect your Heart?" My hope is that you see the vitally important role that the electrical panel / "Heart" plays in contributing to keeping Maine homes safe and care for your "Heart."

Yours for a safer Maine,
Michael LaPlante, Master Electrician

Maine Fire Marshal News

MEFIRS – Maine Fire Incident Reporting System

	Current Statistics 2010*	Final Statistics for 2009
Total Calls:	68,687	78,221
Fire Calls:	3,211	3,809**
EMS Calls:	45,675	50,996
All others:	19,801	23,416
Fire Departments Reporting	179	190
Total Fire Dollar Loss	\$26,168,826	\$39,788,836
Civilian Fire Related Injuries	36	40
Fire Service Fire Related Injuries	31	30
Civilian Fire Related Deaths	9***	14***
Fire Service Fire Related Deaths	0***	1***

* The Fire Marshal's Office will have all data for 2010 in by June-July of 2011.

** Represents single incidents only.

*** Based on SFMO Investigations

NFIRS Web-based Tools

One of the most important elements of fire incident data is the ability to use this information for decision making purposes as well as summarizing the department's activity in various types of reports.

In the National Fire Incident Reporting System website at <http://nfirs.fema.gov> there is a complete section report templates that can do just this. Within the Web-based Tools section of the NFIRS website, is a section called Summary Output Reports Tool. This section contains 23 different report templates that departments can use for reporting out their incident data in a variety of ways. Within the 23 report templates there are additional means to further filter the reports and develop many varieties of queries that allow a department to present their incident data from a wide range of incident report fields. The entire Annual Report of the Office of State Fire Marshal is generated from these templates.

NFIRS 5.0 registered users are automatically provided access to these reports at the time of activation. Departments that use other vendor software can still be provided access to the NFIRS Web-based Tools in order to utilize their department's data that is provided to the NFIRS national database by the Fire Marshal's Office.

A good template from the Web-based tool set to begin using to report and track your departments activity is the *Summary by Incident Type* report. This report is what we use to grab most of the data you see above. The reports, it should be noted, come in pdf, Word, Excel, and html format. You can download these and in the case of the Excel documents begin constructing a year-to-year comparison and eventual trend analysis. Other templates of particular interest to us are the *Structure Fires by Property Use* and *Residential Structure Fire Causes* report. The former report gives you a basic distribution of what types of structures experience most fires while the latter gives you an idea of what is causing residential fires. This latter is very interesting because by watching it out over years you can see how Maine, and perhaps your department, is in fact not like the rest of the nation.

For further information regarding this feature contact the Fire Marshal's Office at 626-3872 or contact Assistant State Fire Marshal Joe Thomas via e-mail at joseph.e.thomas@maine.gov.

"Fight Fire with Facts"



<http://www.smokefreeforme.org/>

MAINE FIREWATCH

By Richard E. Taylor, Senior Research and Planning Analyst

Maine finished 2010 with the fewest fire fatalities in the state's history! Good news right? Wrong. Within the span of three months into 2011 we have already matched the 2010 count of nine fire deaths with nine months left to go. Do understand that January through March are probably the worst months for fire deaths but in July and December, both to come, we also see spikes.

Along with these fatal fires (two of which took the lives of two and three individuals each) we are seeing a lot of fires in general. We are also seeing that the price of #2 heating fuel is soaring to new heights. We won't know if the two are related for some time however. Perhaps the most tragic event was a fire that took the lives of two little girls in Lisbon Falls. The fire swept rapidly through an old farm house pictured below. The fire that started at 7 AM appears to have trapped the children upstairs. It is believed that the fire resulted from an attempt to thaw frozen pipes using a torch.



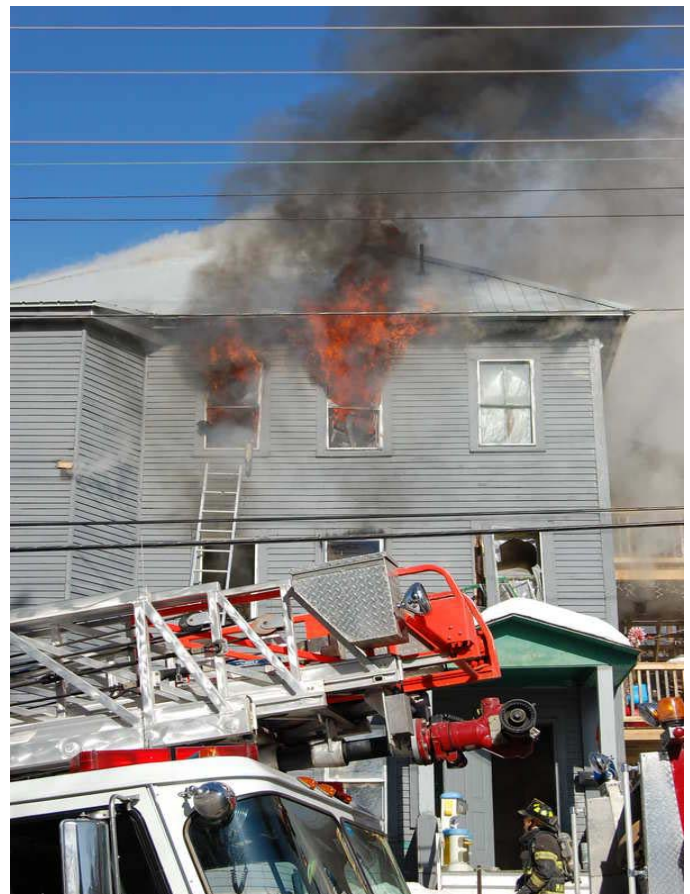
Lisbon Falls Fire

No one will likely ever know what caused a fire that killed three adults in Unity recently. As you can see from the picture below, there is little if anything substantial left of the mobile home that burned. Three killed in a fire is uncommon in Maine.



Unity Fire

The Jay Fire Department battled a blaze apparently started by a child in the apartment building pictured below. Fortunately, in this case no one was killed though twelve people were left without a home. Fire crews from Livermore, Livermore Falls, Wilton, Farmington and Winthrop assisted in the effort.



Jay Fire

This home below was rendered useless following a fire that took place in the early afternoon in West Paris. More than twentyfive firefighters from five departments assisted on the call. The cause of the fire is believed to be the careless disposal of woodstove ashes.



West Paris Fire

The home below was destroyed and two Newport firefighters were knocked to the ground when oxygen tanks used for oxygen therapy purposes exploded. The fire started around the woodstove and is believed to have been caused by the woodstove malfunctioning. The two fire fighters who were knocked down by the blast recovered promptly to continue fighting the fire. They were joined by fireman from Corinna, Pittsfield, Detroit, Etna and Plymouth.



This Month in Fire History

Lakeview Grammar School fire kills 175, Collinwood (OH), 1908
Missouri Athletic Club & bank bldg. fire kills 37, St. Louis (MO), 1914
Strand Theater fire roof collapse kills 13 firefighters, Brockton (MA), 1941
Royal Beach home hotel fire kills 19, Chicago (IL), 1981
First fire prevention legislation passed, Cambridge (MA), 1631
Sparky ® the Fire Dog is born, 1951
Triangle Shirtwaist fire kills 145, New York, 1911
Happy Land Social Club fire kills 87, New York, 1990
First state law banning public use of fireworks passes, Michigan, 1929
Cleveland Hill School fire kills 15, Cheektowaga (NY), 1954

The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, New York 1911

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire is the deadliest workplace accident in New York City history and perhaps the most memorable in American history. The fire that started on the 8th floor of a ten story factory housing a garment factory spread quickly upward to the 9th and 10th stories of the structure. Most of those on the 8th floor made it down through elevators and stairs while those on the 10th climbed over to the neighboring building and survived. Individuals on the 9th floor were the last to know and were not able to utilize any elevators or stairs or cross over to another building. They crammed onto the one fire escape that collapsed sending dozens to their deaths, while others died in flames and many simply jumped from the windows. The fire spawned such public outrage that it redefined labor laws, politics and yes, building codes.



The ninth floor of the Triangle Shirtwaist factory after the fire

UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Smoke-Free Housing Training

Healthy Homes Training

The Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine, in partnership with Maine Asthma Coalition, Maine Asthma Prevention and Control and Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, is providing a free, full-day Healthy Homes Training. The training will cover the seven elements of a healthy home, why they are important and how they can be achieved. This is an excellent opportunity for property managers, contractors, residential coordinators, landlords, home inspectors, code enforcement officers, realtors, health educators, public health professionals and others to learn about the health benefits of creating a healthy home environment in residential settings.

This training will provide information on the seven elements of a healthy home including:

- Lead Poisoning Prevention
- EPA Rules and Regulations
- Pests and Pets
- Cleaning Practices & Poisonings
- Fire/Smoke Detectors & CO and CO Detectors
- Building and Maintenance
- Injury Prevention
- Mold
- Environmental Tobacco Smoke
- Ventilation
- Well-water
- Water Damage & Radon

Four Locations:

Machias
April 5, 8:30am-4:00pm
Department of Health and Human Services
38 Prescott Drive

Presque Isle
April 6, 8:30am-4:00pm
Hampton Inn and Suites
768 Main Street

Auburn
April 12, 8:30am-4:00pm
Hilton Garden Inn
14 Great Falls Plaza

Waterville
April 13, 8:30am-4:00pm
Hampton Inn and Suites
425 Kennedy Memorial Drive



Maine Fire Protection Services Commission 8th Annual Blaine House Conference For First Responders

April 14 & 15, 2011 Point Lookout Resort & Conference Center Northport, Maine

For more information click on the url below:

<http://www.mainechief.com/>

If you have an announcement or upcoming event you'd like to post in this newsletter please feel free to forward it to us using the contact information below. The next issue will be in March 2011.



The **Maine Fire Marshal News** is an electronic publication of the Maine State Fire Marshal's Office.

Editors: Richard E. Taylor & Lori L. Gunn

To submit articles for publication contact the Fire Marshal's Office at (207) 626-3870 and ask to speak with the editors. You may also e-mail an article or comment to Richard.e.taylor@maine.gov

Articles submitted for publication in this newsletter from outside sources do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the State Fire Marshal's Office.

All articles are subject to an editorial staff review prior to inclusion. For a copy of submission requirements contact the editorial staff.

Maine State Fire Marshal
Department of Public Safety
52 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

<http://www.maine.gov/dps/fmo/index.htm>

Phone:
207-626-3870

E-Mail:
Richard.e.taylor@maine.gov